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An assessment of annual damage to Crops
by Elephants in Palamau District, Bihar

BY

J. MISHRA

Deputy Conservator of Forests, Bihar

(*With a plate*)

INTRODUCTION

It is generally thought that elephants have occurred in Palamau forests from time immemorial. However, D. H. Sunder's survey settlement report of the district of Palamau (1896), though it records even the smallest member of the wildlife, does not include elephants and apparently there were none. Elephants migrated to this area sometime in early 1920. Why and where they came from is being investigated. At the time of this report (1970) the number of elephants in Palamau does not exceed sixty.

Every year, since 1950, there has been great publicity on damage to agricultural crops by elephants. Formerly the damage was confined to the thinly populated Garu Range, and was negligible. Slowly in later years the damage spread to Latehar and Barwadih areas. Villages near Betla were the worst affected, for the elephants stayed in Betla from the beginning of the rainy season till the advent of summer. Prior to 1950, elephants had never visited Betla area in the memory of the oldest resident. From 1950 onwards, elephants numbering two to a dozen were recorded to have visited Betla forests. From the year 1965 more elephants started visiting Betla—the maximum number now going up to 45. Another departure that has been noticed in the behaviour of elephants for the

last three years (beginning from the year 1968) is their regular visits to Chainpur area, after crossing the River Koel. The reasons for the extension of range have not been investigated. In their movement from one area to another they visit the fields along their way and the crops are heavily damaged by them.

Though it was known that there was yearly damage to crops by elephants, the quantum of damage remained unknown till this study was undertaken in the year 1969. I set myself to this work with the help of a handful of staff in the National Park and the credit is theirs in taking all pains to make this study a success.

METHODS

To collect day-to-day statistics of the quantum of damage done to crops by elephants, all forest guards were instructed to find out if there had been any damage to crops by wild elephants in their sub-beats. Any damage was recorded the same day in the following proforma.

Name of Village.....Range

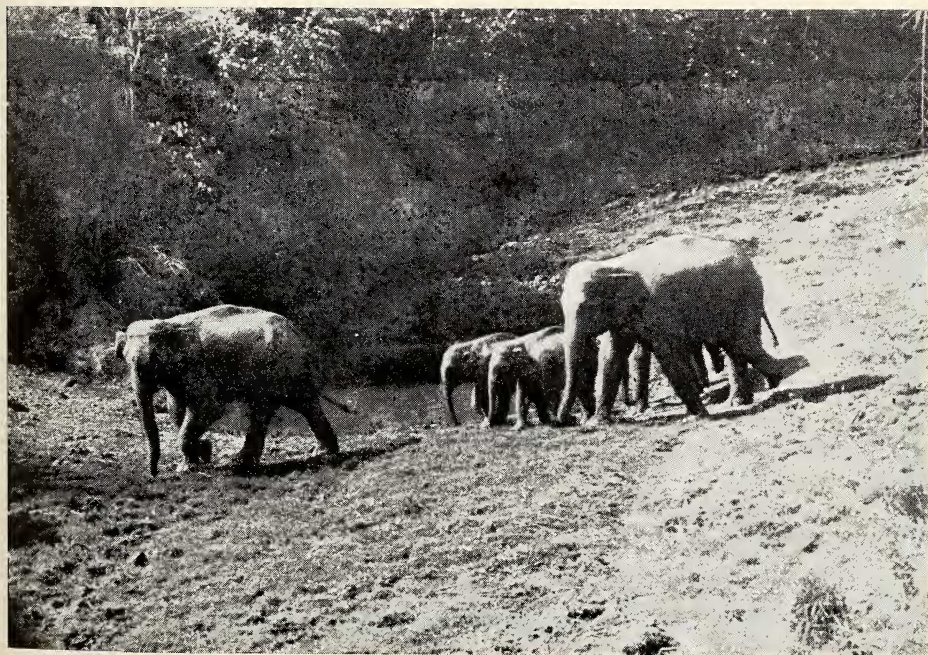
Date	Name of villagers whose crops had been damaged	Area	Damage in Quintals		Total
			Destroyed	Trampled	
1	2	3	4	5	6

Value of damaged crops	Number of elephants visiting the area	Hours of stay of elephants	Remarks
7	8	9	10

The forest guard's report was checked by the Beat Officer who visited the site and if satisfied made an entry in the register kept in the Range Office for this purpose. This scheme worked well and we received reliable statistics of yearly damage to agricultural crops by elephants at Garu, Lat and Barwadih thanas. For Latehar and Chainpur thanas, the data were collected by a single forest guard deputed for this purpose, as both these areas fell outside my jurisdiction.

RESULTS

The study started with the rainy season of the year 1969 when elephants began entering maize fields. From August up to April of the



Elephant herd in the Palamau Forest.

(Photos: Author)

